



A Community-based Approach to Tobacco Prevention: Hawaii's Youth Taking On the Tobacco Industry

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Introduction

More than 400,000 people in the United States die each year as a result of tobacco use.¹ This represents more people than those dying from alcohol, AIDS, motor vehicle accidents, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined.¹ Smoking related illnesses are estimated to cost the nation approximately \$75 billion each year.¹ It is estimated that 4,000 children try their first cigarette every day, another 2,000 become daily smokers, and one-third will die prematurely as a result.² Similar trends in mortality, morbidity, and initiation are evident in Hawaii. In this state of approximately 1.2 million people, tobacco use is responsible for more than 1,100 deaths each year and the burden to the health care system is estimated to cost \$263 million annually.¹ Over 60% of Hawaii high school students reported to having tried smoking, and over 13% become daily smokers.³ As a result, it has been estimated that 23,000 children in Hawaii currently under 18 years of age will ultimately die prematurely as a result of tobacco use.⁴

Research has found that children and adolescents are three times more sensitive to tobacco advertising than adults, and therefore, more likely to be influenced by cigarette marketing.⁵ As a result, one-third of underage experimentation with smoking can be attributed to tobacco industry advertising.⁶ The tobacco industry spends \$4 million a month promoting tobacco in Hawaii specifically targeting and recruiting youth (<18 years) to become replacement smokers for the thousands of smokers who die each year.⁷ Tobacco companies have long been aware of the need to design marketing strategies aimed at young potential smokers, targeting them not only with pro-tobacco messages, but with enticing sales promotions.^{8,9} Cigarette brands popular among adolescents are more likely than adult brands to be advertised in magazines with high youth readerships.¹⁰ Several studies have found these marketing strategies to also be effective in increasing how much adolescents smoke.^{11,12} Receptivity to tobacco advertising has been shown to be associated with intention to smoke¹³ and strongly linked to smoking initiation.¹⁴

Adolescents today are well acquainted with the negative effects of tobacco use. Many interventions targeting the negative aspects of tobacco are considered ineffective in deterring initiation or reducing consumption among current smokers.¹⁵ Thus adolescent tobacco prevention programs have been undertaken in the United States in an effort to prevent the onset of smoking. Prevention efforts initially focused on the dissemination of information, most notably the negative health effects of smoking, and were implemented as individual-based initiatives. While individually focused strategies remain important, advocacy and community-based interventions have become the focus of many tobacco control efforts. Programs that combine interpersonal and community factors are more effective in decreasing tobacco use among adolescents.¹⁶

One such community-based intervention that uses peer-led initiatives targeting not the smoker, but the industry, has had a positive impact on increasing awareness and reducing smoking uptake.¹⁷ These messages are given greater credibility as they originate from, and are disseminated to, youth who identify with each other.¹⁵ A number of states have initiated youth-led movements as part of their comprehensive tobacco control programs.¹⁸ The long-term goals of these movements are to reduce tobacco use. Strategies used to accomplish this goal include developing youth leadership,¹⁹ developing anti-tobacco industry campaigns, and using peer-to-peer communication.²⁰ These strategies are intended to influence youth to become empowered, leading them to take control of their lives and to avoid the targeting efforts of the tobacco industry encouraging them to initiate smoking.¹⁹

Across the United States youth-led community groups have been working against tobacco use either in conjunction with a mass media campaign or as an independent entity.¹⁸ The primary goal of these "youth empowerment groups" is to create a presence in the community that can change norms about tobacco through peer influence and other supporting activities. These activities include training of group members (media literacy, advocacy, leadership skills, and basic knowledge of tobacco), peer education, public speaking, youth anti-tobacco "summits", distribution of anti-tobacco gear (for example, T-shirts, stickers, caps), and policy advocacy. The distribution of gear and sponsorship of events attempt to foster the development of a youth anti-tobacco brand. The campaign sends a message to teens that their brand is in touch with youth interests through free merchandise and sponsoring youth events.¹⁸

Florida's SWAT was the first statewide youth movement against tobacco.¹⁸ Florida branded its campaign "truth" and distributed "truth" branded gear. Because Florida experienced some declines in youth smoking,²¹ several similar youth empowerment groups in various states have been established. Within Hawaii, tobacco control efforts that are youth-centered remain relevant and critically important. This type of peer empowerment has the potential to impact not only smoking related attitudes and behaviors, but can inspire youth to use leadership and advocacy skills to combat tobacco in not only their private life but in their community as well.

Youth Advocacy and Empowerment Efforts in Hawaii

In Hawaii, the youth empowerment program is called REAL: Hawaii Youth Movement Against the Tobacco Industry. REAL was established in 2000 by 15 youths (the Founding Board) from around the state as an empowered, branded, anti-tobacco youth movement. REAL now has more than 2,500 members statewide between the

Table 1.— Characteristics of REAL members involved in the 2004 telephone survey

	Characteristics	Percentage (n= 400)
Gender	Male	27.8
	Female	72.3
Ethnicity	Hawaiian/Part Hawaiian	37.7
	Asian (Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Other)	37.2
	Caucasian	12.2
	Other Pacific Islander	5.1
	Spanish/Latino	4.1
	African American	1.0
	Mixed or Other	2.8
Time Since Joined	<6 Months	21.0
	1-2 Years	47.3
	>2 Years	26.5
Age in years	12-15	40.1
	16-19	58.9
Level of Involvement	Not Active	44.3
	Somewhat to Very Active	55.9
Ever tried smoking	Yes	31.1
Smoked In the Past 30 Days	Yes	5.6
Think Will Smoke At All in the next year	No	94.1

ages of 13-19 as well as alumni (over the age of 20). REAL has raised awareness of the tobacco industry's manipulation of teens amongst thousands more through REAL events, activities, street marketing, and presentations. REAL is committed to providing a broad range of youth-run, youth-led initiatives aimed at raising awareness about tobacco prevention and tobacco industry's media campaigns, empowering youth, and developing advocacy and leadership skills.

The overall aim of REAL is to raise awareness of and to educate Hawaii's youth about the manipulative marketing strategies used by the tobacco industry's and to offer opportunities to take action against the industry. This is achieved by: a) Increasing awareness among youth in Hawaii about REAL and REAL's message in order to change their attitudes and social norms around tobacco use; b) Empowering youth to make their own decisions through statewide and community leadership opportunities; and c) Developing advocacy skills among REAL leaders and members so they will take action in tobacco prevention.

A core component of REAL is partnership development. Partnerships have been developed with several organizations and groups including: the Department of Health Tobacco Prevention & Education Program (DOH TPEP), the American Cancer Society, the Department of Education's Peer Education Program, and the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Hawaii. REAL has collaborated with community partners on a broad range of tobacco control initiatives including: Kick Butts Day, Great American Smoke Out, World No Tobacco Day, as well as advocacy activities involving the State Legislature and local political issues. REAL has expanded relationships with rural and neighbor island reach and youth-serving organizations, such as Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, Tobacco Free Coalitions, Waimanalo Health Center, Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center, Hawaii Youth Services Network, The Center (Gay and Lesbian Community Center), Coalition for a Drug Free Hawaii, Teenline, American Lung Association, Cancer Information Services, Alu Like, Kalihi Palama Health Center, Hui Malama Learning Center, American Friends Service Committee, and Americorps Hana Like Program. REAL has also developed a Partnership Network Council (PNC) which was created to bring youth-serving organizations together with the goal of increasing the number of community programs educating and empowering youth against tobacco. The PNC has held quarterly meetings and distributed quarterly newsletters to youth serving organizations in Hawaii in order to inform groups of upcoming tobacco control and prevention activities.

REAL's efforts have not gone unnoticed and have received a number of awards at the program and individual level: REAL received an award for "2002 Outstanding Youth Organization Advocate"; REAL was also recognized in 2002 by the State of Hawaii House of Representatives for the contribution the movement has made as an advocate for the children and youth of Hawaii. REAL was honored by the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Hawaii for the advocacy work to help pass the smoke-free county ordinances. REAL was twice a finalist for the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids National Youth Group Advocate of the Year Award (2004, 2005), presented annually in Washington D.C. Youth leaders have also been recognized for their individual contributions to tobacco control and prevention by being nominated for the Youth Advocate of the Year Award from the Coalition for Tobacco Free Hawaii in 2004 and Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment and Leadership (APPEAL) Youth Fellowship.

Impact of REAL on Members

Evaluation of REAL's impact on youth members has been an ongoing process. Information is collected for each activity monitoring items such as number of participants, and level of interest. This data allows REAL staff and youth leaders to evaluate the program's performance and to build on previous experiences. Surveys completed after various presentations and trainings have consistently demonstrated that youth have been interested in what they have been exposed to, that they acquired new skills, and that they found the information useful.

A telephone survey was undertaken in 2004 with a random sample of 400 of the 1768 members aged between 13 and 19 years old. Participants involved in the survey represented the ethnic diversity of Hawaii and were predominantly female (Table 1). Most participants had been members for 1-2 years and were between 16-19 years of

age. Just over half of the participants (55.9%) reported that they were somewhat to very involved with REAL. Younger members, 12-15 years of age, were more likely to be somewhat to very active (64.4%) compared to older members, 16-19 years (50.3%).

Furthermore, a higher proportion of members that joined in the past 6 months were more likely to be somewhat to very active (69.9%) compared with those that joined in the past 1-2 years (59.4%) or over 2 years ago (42.4%). Most members reported they joined REAL for the following reasons: a) because they believe in the cause (96.8%), b) wanted to make a difference (93.0%), and c) wanted to learn new skills (79.8%). Members heard about REAL though a friend (25.0%), attended a REAL event (22.8%), or at school (19.8%).

Most participants felt that hearing the REAL message from peers is effective (82.8%), and that attacking the tobacco industry is an effective way to interest youth (63.3%). REAL has also had a positive impact on youth anti-tobacco advocacy efforts among members. Sixty percent (60%) of participants reported that they had tried to convince friends and family to quit using tobacco 4 or more times in the past 12 months. Furthermore, 14.3% of participants reported that they had actively tried to convince school or government officials to be more concerned about tobacco issues.

Just over 30% of survey participants reported that they had ever tried smoking, yet only 5.6% stated they had smoked a cigarette in the past 30 days. These rates for smoking in the past 30 days are well below 18.7% reported by Hawaii high school students of similar age (22). A large majority of participants (77.3%) reported that involvement in REAL had been somewhat to very helpful in helping them avoid using tobacco. Results from this evaluation provide evidence demonstrating that using a youth empowerment model can be effective in changing attitudes and behaviors of Hawaii's youth toward tobacco use.

Conclusion

REAL: Hawaii Youth Movement Against the Tobacco Industry has demonstrated that it can have a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviors of its members. REAL captures the attention of youth through 'edgy' marketing; motivates youth to resist tobacco products by educating them about the manipulative strategies used by the tobacco industry to target young people; enables youth to advocate against the tobacco industry; and mobilizes them to be actively involved in tobacco control and prevention initiatives. As a result youth advocacy and empowerment has become a recognized component of a comprehensive statewide tobacco control and prevention program in Hawaii. Future directions for REAL include continued brand development with the inclusion of a mass media component, evaluation of the impact that anti-tobacco messaging has on Asian and Pacific Islander youth in Hawaii, and examine the long-term effects that participation in REAL have on members and alumni.

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For more information about the Cancer Research Center, please visit our website at www.crch.org.

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